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Hath Sin a Sex?

HATH SIN A SEX?

OR

THE WORLD NEVER FORGIVES HER.

A Play in Two Acts.

BY

RICHARD D. KATHRENS

Discussing an important Problem presented by a common, but little understood, phase of our Social life.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS.

Mildred Brewer—Acquainted with the ways of the world. Cares nothing much for the *respectables* of society; somewhat cynical and imbittered but withal a noble woman and a steadfast friend.

Beulah Waring —Anxious to reform. One of the million struggling heroines, of whose trials and sacrifice the world takes no heed.

Scene of the Play—New York City.

Time—Present.

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HATH SIN A SEX?

ACT I. (Scene)—Drawing room of an elegantly appointed apartment in Twenty-ninth Street, near Fifth Avenue.

Mildred—(In a lounging robe, lazily reclining on a divan, reading a book—puts aside the book, assumes a thoughtful or puzzled expression, and begins to talk)—Nearly seventy-three and Beulah not here; and gone the whole blessed day, too. I wonder what has happened; she never did such a thing before. And, Jack will never forgive her (*Telephone rings*). O, probably that is she now. (*Answers the 'phone.*) Hello!—not yet—I am expecting her every minute—can't imagine what's keeping her—Yes, I'll be sure to tell her—she'll be sorry, I know—is that so—she did—Well, wait a minute till I get a pencil—now,—at Holland, 8:30—I won't forget—Good-bye! (*Hangs up receiver and continues to talk*)—What in the world can have happened to that girl—something most unusual, I'll wager. She never before failed to keep her engagements with Jack—it's just like burning up a hundred dollar bill. (*Enter Beulah.*)

Beulah—O, Mildred, I am so happy, I can hardly keep from crying.

Mildred—What has kept you out all day, girlie? Jack says you promised to be here all afternoon—

Beulah—Yes, that is so.

Mildred—He has called up a half dozen times since four o'clock. He says he has made all arrangements for a big night at Sherry's, and that you must not fail him. He will not be able to call for you, but says that a taxi-cab will be waiting for you at the Ladies' entrance of the Holland House, at 8:30. He insisted that I write it all down so there would be no mistake, for he would not be able to 'phone again, and—O, yes—he told me to be sure to say that it would be the event of your life!

Beulah—The *event* of my life. Dear old Jack! I'll have to disappoint him tonight. I have gone to Sherry's for the last time.

Mildred—Why girl, are you mad—disappoint Jack! Do

you know what you are saying? Why, Jack Dawson is the envy and despair of a thousand girls—and he'd stake his last dollar on you. Are you going to deliberately cut yourself off from your best opportunity? Now, Beulah, don't do any rash or sentimental thing.

Beulah—I am neither rash nor sentimental, Mildred. I have resolved to give up this life, and I want *you* to help me keep that resolution—won't *you* help me?

Mildred—Why, I don't quite understand—of course—I—I'll do anything for you—but, give you up.

Beulah—Even that—you must give me up (*Mildred looks at her in astonishment*)—Listen Mildred. I want to do the *right* thing—I am not happy, living as I do, and I am going to make a change—one that I have long had in contemplation—but I lacked the courage to act, until today. I have already made the first step, and now I want—I *need* your support—don't make it hard for me.

Mildred—What in the world has come over you—what has happened, for goodness sake? You talk like one in the very depths of the dumps—and just at a time when everything seems to be coming your way—

Beulah—Everything—but the things I most desire! I have been *working* today, Mildred—

Mildred—Working—*working*! Certainly gone crazy—

Beulah (*not taking notice of Mildred's remark*)—and I will need rest tonight, so I will be bright and alert tomorrow. I put in an application at Lacy's about a month ago—I've been planning a long time on this move—and yesterday afternoon I was asked to call at the Manager's office. Of course I was unable to furnish any references; so I claimed to be a stranger in New York, but my evident earnestness brought me success, and I was assigned to a counter in the Handkerchief Department.

Mildred—Your *evident earnestness*, indeed! Your pretty face, I rather believe; and pray, how much money will Lacy's give you for gracing their Handkerchief Department?

Beulah—Not much, to begin with—only Six and a Half a week—but—

Mildred (*breaks in*)—Six and a Half! Six Dollars and a Half *a week*? Why you won't be able to *crist* on that—that won't more than pay your manicuring bill—

Beulah—But, I'm green you know, dear; and I won't need to care much about manicuring. Thousands of other girls—better girls than I—manage to get along on less money. I certainly should be able to make out; then, it's honorable

work, Mildred, and my earnest, diligent application to my duties will, I am sure, win early promotion for me.

Mildred—O, Beulah, your optimism is sublime! As if devoted services, alone ever got fair recognition in a Department store—you won't have any chance at all with the shiftless coquette, at the other end of the counter, who gets down late in the mornings, neglects her trade, is indifferent as to sales and conducts herself generally as if she owned the building—

Beulah—(*laughingly*) Why, I don't understand you! Why in the world won't I be able to pass her—It's not reasonable to presume that business is conducted that way.

Mildred—It is not a matter of reason, dear, nor business either. You won't be able to pass that girl, for the simple reason that you will not be willing to do the things that she does, and on that account, you will fail to awaken the same interest in the Manager of the Department. That's all there is to it, Beulah, and you will find that I am not far wrong.

Beulah—Surely, dear, your cynicism is getting the better of your judgment. It cannot be that *all* men are bad, and, Mildred, honest effort must sometime win?

Mildred—I will not say that *all* men are *bad*—not exactly that—but I think, as a basis of argument, I am safe in the assumption that only *few* men are *good*; and I grant you that *honest effort may sometime win*, but at best that is most uncertain, and are you going to stake all on such a problematical outcome—what if your dream should fail to come true?

Beulah—I shall try again, and trust to Heaven for strength.

Mildred—I really believe you are losing your mind!

Beulah—Quite to the contrary, Mildred, I firmly believe I am just finding my mind—this is the awakening.

Mildred—(*raising both hands in gesture of impatience*) In the language of the Haymarket, Beulah, you are the limit! Your innocence is charming, but pathetic; your judgment in this whole matter is controlled by one of those ephemeral fancies vulgarly called a "pipe"—This is an intensely practical old world in which we live, and you will find, my dear, that money talks, and it doesn't much matter where or how you get it—just so you get it.

Beulah—*Money* is not all, Mildred! This life of indolence and un-earned leisure has perverted our notions of things—dress and diamonds and midnight revelries are the ideals we have followed—passing baubles that lure us on to destruction! There is only *one* thing worth while, Mildred, and that is *love*! Not the fawning flattery of a *roué*, or the counterfeit devotion of a libertine who makes virtues of our vices for his

own ignoble ends, and then leaves us ever after to bear the scars of his cancerous touch—but, a deep and holy attachment inspired by a pure and worthy life!

Mildred—Your eloquence quite overpowers me, and places me at a great disadvantage, for I, too—perverse as I am—keenly feel the truth of what you say—but, as I just remarked, Beulah dear, this is a practical world, and we must live life much as we find it—not as we would.

Beulah—Where there's a will there's a way, you know—

Mildred—No, I do not know. That's a trite sentence, and it's engaging to the ear, but—let's talk sense, Beulah—How are you going to live on Six and a Half Dollars a week? Noble sentiments, honorable motives, good intentions, high purposes and all that, *will not buy any thing!* The rent man will continue to demand *money*; so will the grocer and the dressmaker, and you will be obliged to deal with these necessary evils on their own terms—What are you going to do about it, my dear?

Beulah—I'll have to do like other girls, I suppose. Of course I will have to modify my tastes somewhat—deny myself many things, and skimp a little, perhaps, but I will have lifted myself out of a life of shame and dishonor, and therein lies the real compensation—more, far more, to me, than money!—

Mildred—I am utterly unable to follow you—I—I—

Beulah—Forgive me, Mildred dear, if I have spoken inconsiderately—I would not wound you for the world—I am beside myself tonight and I hardly know what I am saying.

Mildred—O, that's all right. I take no exception to the reproach in your speech, but it is the impracticability of your plans to which I object.

Beulah—But this life is intolerable to me, Mildred, and I must get out of it the best way I can. I love Jack, as you know, but I cannot continue to live on this way—languishing in luxury—but cut off from all the most cherished things of life. You know the attitude of his family; and I am like a mill-stone about his neck, and in the eyes of his Mother, I am a nameless thing—although I would give my life for him—but, let's not talk of Jack, now. I am determined to win my way back to the position I have forfeited—and by honest work.

Mildred—Your purpose is beautiful, Beulah, but your method is wrong, I fear—your plans are defective.

Beulah—The die is cast, Mildred; my duty is before me, and I propose to perform it, however difficult and hopeless it

may appear. There is no turning back now, and I am happy—so happy, even in contemplation of it.

Mildred (*half flippantly*)—It is quite apparent that you are overjoyed—indeed; you seem as happy as if you were going to a funeral—

Beulah—Ah, the funeral of my dead past!

Mildred—But, you talk in riddles, Beulah—Jack will not listen to any of this.

Beulah—Jack shall know nothing of my plans—nothing of my whereabouts; from this day forward, I shall be as one dead to him. I shall deny myself to all—even to you, best and truest friend girl ever had!

Mildred (*in astonishment*)—Why, Beulah! What do you mean?

Beulah—Just exactly what I say. I shall leave here in the morning, and only you, Mildred, of all my past shall know aught of me or my doings, and I want to swear you to absolute secrecy.

Mildred—You marvel me, and your determined manner quite takes my breath away—but, granting that you do as you say—how am I to account for your absence?

Beulah—Just don't try to account—

Mildred—I'll have to say something—

Beulah—Well, say anything then—that—that—I was becoming moody of late—a bit queer, if you like,—and that—I—I—just left the apartment one morning, and—and failed to come back, or say any other thing that comes into your mind—only not the slightest intimation of the facts, and not a hint of my whereabouts—you'll promise me, won't you, Mildred?

Mildred—If you insist; of course, I will promise to do anything for you—that is, undertake to do anything—but I know I shall acquit myself most awkwardly.

Beulah—Now, to continue: I intend to take a quiet little room in Fifty-second Street near Ninth Avenue. I went over there at noon today, and made all arrangements. An express-man will call tomorrow for my trunk.

Mildred—For your *trunk*!—then this is only to be an experiment, and if things do not turn out as you have planned, you will come back, won't you?

Beulah—No, dear, I shall never return.

Mildred—But what can you put in a trunk—what do you propose to do with the car load of other things you have here, that won't go in a trunk?

Beulah—I will need, and take only a trunk—such plain

clothes as befits the station of a working girl—Mother's picture—and yours—and—and Jack's, and everything else I shall leave behind.

Mildred—Give up your rings and other jewels! Why, you must be mad, girl!

Beulah—They shall be left with the rugs and pictures and hats and gowns and parasols, and what-not, to find such ownership as will accept or claim them. I have not honestly earned, and do not deserve them—and I give them up, forever!

Mildred—That speech is worthy of a Joan of Arc. Little does the world know of such heroism! What do you expect to gain by this voluntary exile, and self-imposed immolation?

Beulah—The esteem and respect of *good* people—and the consciousness of my own worthiness!

Mildred—Beulah, dear, I should be lost indeed to every sense of right and decency, if I failed to appreciate the great worth of your splendid sentiment, or sought to turn you from your high resolve—

Beulah—Bless your dear heart—

Mildred—But, I feel that you are following the most difficult course—I dare say, the *wrong* way round.

Beulah—There is no alternative, Mildred—and the longer I delay, the harder it will be for me.

Mildred—But why pay this awful price—there must be some easier way?

Beulah—There is *no other* way—the price must be paid.

Mildred—I fear you have only the *end* in view, and have not counted the great cost. Why sacrifice your life in this cruel way, "for the esteem of good people"—who are the *good* people; and will they respect you the more because you scourge yourself? I insist, you have chosen the wrong way, Beulah! What have these *good* people done for you—what are they going to do? The world cares nothing for you—your sufferings, or your denials, and why should you care for the world—its flattery or its frown? We are *what we are*, Beulah, because we are caught up in the great, eternal laws, and surrounded by conditions—not of our making—that impel us to *do*, or not to *do*. Nature takes no note of our station—she counts our joys and sorrows just the same, and gives us all to the worms at last—So—

Beulah—O, Mildred, Mildred!—

Mildred (*continues*)—So, why not make the most of it while we may? I intend to get all that's coming to me out of life, and I'm not going to borrow any unnecessary trouble; or kill my nature—just to please a lot of hypocritical old

gossips who think that heaven was made for dolts and dyspeptics. For goodness sake, don't act rashly. Don't burn all your bridges and thus render retreat all the more difficult.

Beulah—I am not acting rashly, Mildred; I have carefully considered my step for months, and have tried to view it from every angle. So far, I am satisfied, and the prospect is pleasing to me—Listen, dear:—I have been in my *new* world *just one* day, but already I am privileged to meet, and to talk freely with people who would not have touched elbows with me yesterday. I am no longer a *thing* to be spurned—but lifted to the surface again, by the magic of changed surroundings. I feel like a *new* being—indeed, I am a *woman* once more! O, what a joy, to mingle with respectable people and to feel a sense of equality!

Mildred—Your idea of *equality*, I am sure, is not shared by any of the *respectables* you waited on today.

Beulah—But here are the facts, as I see them: *Yesterday* I was a creature of the under-world (*Mildred displays some emotion and puts her hand across her face*)—It's an awful confession to make, but there's no disguising the fact, Mildred, it is true—living in ease and elegance, yes—pampered and flattered, to be sure, but ostracised by society—made to feel in a thousand ways the shame and degradation of my position—forbidden to associate—even to *talk* with decent people; and, *today*—all day, I have been dealing cross-counter with most estimable ladies—pure and light-hearted women—many of them members of the best and most reputable families. O, why should I not feel rejoiced! After while, some of them will take me up, and life will open anew for me—is it not worth *every* sacrifice!

Mildred—I envy you your hopeful disposition; and your confidence in human nature is simply sublime! I certainly wish you every possible success, but I fear for the morrow, Beulah—the stern reality, as you will one day find it. You have a much colored notion about these “members of reputable families,” and their *real* interest in a poor working-girl.

Beulah—If you could only put aside your pessimism, and come with me—but that's hoping for too much now, perhaps; but, dear, I want you to know my happiness shall never be complete, until you, too, are emancipated from this miserable bondage.

Mildred—Emancipated! Ah, a consummation devoutly to be wished, but not among the possibilities! This is a *man's* world, Beulah! Its privileges and immunities are all for *him*. His mistakes are not treasured against him, but are charged off to innocence—ignorance—youth, or even justified on the ground that “boys will be boys,” you know. No such sweet

charity for us! Girls may not be girls, in the same sense—only the straight and narrow path for them and the slightest deviation—through fault or frailty—may mean disaster—a blighted future—a social convict for life. The conventions of society, Beulah, run hard against the woman!

Beulah—But, must we submit without a struggle—surrender our independence—forfeit our womanhood forever, and sink, and sink and sink! O, Mildred! I cannot agree with your philosophy.

Mildred—We have no independence, and our footing is never secure! Our manner and dress and speech are everybody's business. If we are light-hearted and free, we are censured for it; our motives and purposes are continually being misunderstood; our smiles—unless most thoughtfully bestowed—are made the warrant for liberties or unwelcome attentions, and our glances are given a lascivious meaning; our little indiscretions are magnified into enormities, and the very foundations of our good name may be swept away, by the ever growing force of an *idle* tale, sent upon a mission of evil. There is no escape, Beulah—it is the *inevitable* against which we struggle, and it is of no use to hope for emancipation!

Beulah—What are we to do?

Mildred—Make the most of it, dear—just like the man in the trench, who would trade places with the millionaire.

Beulah (*quickly*)—But, some men have done even that.

Mildred—Yes, yes, that is true—but they were *men*!

Beulah—O, Mildred, you defeat me at every turn. I cannot match your philosophy in words. Your pessimism makes the whole world black, and you persist in taking only the gloomy view.

Mildred—No, you mistake me, Beulah; I do not take the *gloomy* view, but I take the *only* view that the facts reveal. This life holds no charms for me—there is nothing in this sort of an existence that is to my taste or native desire. You know my story. I did not seek this life. I was lured into it through the perfidy of a man I loved—I was a silly, simple girl then. He was strong and handsome, and I believed him all he seemed to be. He brought me here, and then left me broken hearted and alone—taking from me the only thing I had earned—the protection of his name! It's a queer world, Beulah; he is honored and respected today, while I—I—am an—outcast, left to drift with the tide—at the mercy of the storm!

Beulah—There, there, dear—it's a cruel shame. I know you have suffered much. You have endured enough to imbitter the life of a saint.

Mildred—But, I am not bitter. I am only trying to be reasonable, and to save you needless grief and pain—

Beulah—O, Mildred, Mildred—

Mildred—Listen to me, dear: I have passed through the experience that awaits you, if you persist in your plans. I have had day dreams, too—high hopes—beautiful ideals—soul desires—that for the moment lifted me above myself—out of the shadow and into the radiance of the sun—but my plans always failed, just when it seemed that the longed-for hour of deliverance was at hand. However well I planted—however zealously I tended the little garden of my hopes—defeat and desolation and despair were my harvest! After repeated failures, I realized that I was waging a hopeless warfare with Fate—but I knew not what to do. The alternative of suicide stared me in the face; and the dark and silent river where many a poor, disconsolate girl had sought rest and peace, beckoned me to its placid bosom, but I lacked the courage—I lacked the courage—

Beulah—O, is there no justice—is there no forgiveness for the woman!—may she not amend her life, and regain her lost estate?

Mildred—No, Beulah, there is no justice for the woman who is said to have fallen—the world never forgives her. I have learned the lesson—to my great sorrow, the bitter, stinging truth has come home to me—I know enough of the world and society and wagging tongues to know that *a woman cannot reform, if she would!* And, these very “respectables” about whom you talk—these delightful, indulgent, gentle folk—these obsequious sisters that you have been dealing with to-day, have no *real* interest in you. Their apparent concern is not genuine—their smiles are affected and their hearts are not sincere. Don’t be deceived, dear—don’t mistake the shadow for the substance! Not *one* of these *friends* in your new world would stoop to defend your honor, if some irresponsible scandal monger chanced to make you the subject of attack. Just let them know your story, and they would turn on you like hell cats—they would disdainfully lift their skirts and pass you by as a thing to be despised—caring not one whit what might become of you—and all your sacrifice and struggle and pain would avail you nothing—nothing!

Beulah—I am quite unnerved by your recital, and your persuasive argument shakes my confidence in myself—but I must not falter now—I must go on whatever the consequence. Do not, dear, I beg of you (*telephone rings*) do not seek further to dissuade me from my purpose.

Mildred—I shall desist, my dear, but I could not see you

go, without warning you of the rocks ahead (*telephone rings again*).

Beulah—(*takes up phone, but concludes to let Mildred answer it*)—You answer it, Mildred, please, and if anyone wants me, say I can't be seen tonight, and if they insist, say that I am not here.

Mildred—(*at the 'phone*)—Hello!—Yes, this is she—but, it's 8:30 now—can't I beg off tonight? Well, wait a minute (*places her hand over the mouth-piece of 'phone and addresses herself to Beulah*)—It's Clarence, and he wants me to go to Martin's with him, but I haven't the heart to go now.

Beulah—By all means, dear, go and have a good time—

Mildred—But I should not leave you at this time—I am fearfully upset—

Beulah—Let me insist, dear, go, and dismiss me and my affairs for awhile—tell him you will go.

Mildred—Well (*continues telephone talk*) Hello!—all right—when may I expect you—O, just my hat and gloves—in two minutes—I'll be at the entrance—By-by! (*hangs up 'phone and turns to Beulah*)—Clarence is just across the street at the Breslin, and says he will be at our entrance by the time I reach there (*hurriedly putting on hat and gloves all the while*). It's a shame, though, to leave in this unceremonious way—I should much prefer to remain with you, under the circumstances—but I shall not be out late tonight—

Beulah—Now don't hurry yourself. I shall keep busy packing-up, you know, and we'll have a long talk when you return.

Mildred—Not later than 11:30, and you'll not retire before that.

Beulah—I'll be waiting for you, and wide awake as an owl.

Mildred—(*both at the door, by this time*)—I trust I have not added to your already too heavy burden. Forgive me if my earnestness and zeal have carried me too far—forget the harsh or cruel things I may have spoken—my cynicism and pessimism—and remember only the spirit of my protest, and the sister's heart that prompts it. (*Exeunt Mildred.*)

Beulah—Bless her dear heart! She means well, I know. (*Takes down from the wall, picture of her Mother—reaches across mantel for Jack's—gazes on picture for a moment, and then overcome by her emotion, bends her head on her arm—Curtain.*)

ACT II.

(*Beulah Waring's modest quarters in Fifty-second St. Three months have passed since Beulah determined to give up the old life. The action of this scene begins early in the evening, after working hours. Beulah has just entered—lights the gas stove—puts on the water to boil—takes up her sewing—acts nervously.*)

Beulah—When will my past cease to upbraid me! Like Banquo's ghost, it sits at every feast, and reproaches me! There seems to be no escape from myself. Try as I will, the follies of other days, like grim specters, haunt me; and just when my hopes are highest—they rise before me, and mock my earnest efforts at reform. I am desolate, indeed. O, if I were only a man! I might start over again, and the world would applaud and encourage me. Something is woefully wrong in our system which gives a sex to sin, and forces the weaker one to bear the entire burden! To be born a girl, it would seem, is the unpardonable sin! But, I should not complain—it is my life, and I must live it—I have chosen my path, and I must pursue it now to the end. Maybe, after all, I am borrowing trouble unnecessarily—but, I feel so helpless tonight—so alone. If I could only turn to someone who believes in me—someone to whom I might unburden my bursting heart—who would sympathize with me, and comfort and advise me. (*A rapping at the door*)—Who can that be (*nervously opens the door*)—Mildred! Mildred!!

Mildred—Beulah! (*Both embrace*)—I just could not wait another minute—ages have passed since we parted—

Beulah—Nearly three months—

Mildred—It seems like ages to me. Would you believe it—I have tried forty times to come here, but each time I discovered that my movements were being observed, and I hesitated and delayed, until—well, until my anxiety got the mastery of my caution. I just couldn't deny myself any longer. I knew you could not come to me; and I was becoming fearful lest you should think me indifferent and forgetful.

Beulah—O, no, no, dear; I know that a friendship like ours could not die so soon—that your heart would not grow cold.

Mildred—And, haven't you missed me, Beulah? Now,

honor-bright—have there not been moments when your heart has asked for me?

Beulah—O, dear, my heart pleads for you always. I've missed you every minute. I've hungered for you—and, just now—all unconsciously my very soul was crying¹ out for you—someone to love me—someone who would believe in me, and—as if in answer to my prayer—you came! I need you now, Mildred,—your advice—your strong heart, more, more than ever before! (*gives way to her emotion*)

Mildred—Calm your dear self; I know what you need (*looking about the room*)—it's air and sunshine, and a few comforts—

Beulah—No, no, no! I have all I need—all I deserve. It's the penalty of the past that I am required to pay, and I feel my strength is failing me.

Mildred—It's enough to rack anybody's nerves to live alone, in this cheerless garret. I had no idea that you were cooped up in this miserable place, while I was enjoying every luxury. It's wrong, Beulah,—it's wrong, I say. Why should you sacrifice your young life—I did wrong when I promised to help you carry out your mad resolve, and a greater wrong to have kept that promise.

Beulah—But you have kept the secret of my whereabouts?

Mildred—Yes, yes—and now I see the folly of it, and the cruel shame. I have met every one we ever knew, and in answer to their anxious inquiry, I told them all the same beautiful lie—that you had just disappeared—without an explanation, or a word of good-bye, you just vanished. And then our *dear friends* began to speculate, and my very conscience tortured me. The poet was right, Beulah: "Thy friends will all assail, if the world shall first assail." They were all kind and considerate enough to believe that perhaps you had met-up with some rich Westerner, and had just given us all the slip, so you would not have any compromising explanations to make.—O, how I could have scratched their eyes out! Only *one* was good enough to believe in you—

Beulah—And that one—who, pray?

Mildred—Can you not guess? (*Beulah hangs her head*)—Why Jack, of course—dear old Jack! He is still unconsolable. He's a changed man—nothing seems to interest him, or to distract him from memories of you. The one great regret of his life, Beulah, is that he did not marry you.

Beulah—But, his family, Mildred!—

Mildred—The deuce take his family—what matters his family, if you love each other? They would get over their scruples after a while—and if they didn't—why should you

two sacrifice your lives, because of a foolish family notion! Beulah, *Love* is the supreme test, and not the social standing of somebody's Papa—especially when that social position is largely a matter of bank account. Jack believes in you, Beulah, and if I am any judge of the depth of a man's devotion—he'd stake his life on you!

Beulah—(*anxiously*) What does Jack think has become of me?

Mildred—He has never expressed himself definitely in my presence. He listens to what other people have to say, and shakes his head. He often asks me if I am not keeping something from him that he should know. He seems terribly worried, and, I really believe, that down in his heart he thinks that possibly you have taken your life—never a suspicion of a doubt has entered his mind, and your praises are continually on his lips.

Beulah—O, I am so thankful for that assurance—

Mildred—And I—I am going to take you back to Jack, where you belong.

Beulah—No, Mildred, I have given up the old life forever! and you must not seek to distract me from my resolve. I'll go back to Jack—only when I may do so honorably!

Mildred—Why be obdurate, Beulah, this slaving existence is telling on you—it is killing your young heart. What can you find in such an empty life?

Beulah—My life is not *empty*—indeed every minute of my time is occupied. I'm up at 6 every morning—make my breakfast—tidy-up my room, get to the store by 7:30, and at work by 8 o'clock. From that time, until 5:30, I have little dead time—

Mildred—But the monotony of it all—no relief—no diversion—It would kill me—

Beulah—In the evenings, I do my washing and mending, and find some time to read. I have been very happy here—very, very happy—*until today!*

Mildred—O, yes, I have talked so much that you had almost forgotten to tell me the terrible thing that has happened.

Beulah—I wish to heaven that I might forget—

Mildred—I shall be all attention now—

Beulah—It's a long story, Mildred, but I shall hurry through with it.—

Shortly after I commenced work at Lacy's, a Mrs.

Marshall—one of the dearest, sweetest women you would wish to know—came to my counter, and engaged me in conversation. She seemed to take an unusual interest in me from the very start, and since that time she has been an almost daily caller at my department—and you can't imagine what cheer and comfort I have received from her visits and her gracious, kindly attentions! She has been like a mother to me, and I have looked forward each day for her coming. There was something in her atmosphere that seemed to put at rest all my doubts and misgivings—her very presence breathed peace and goodness and purity and love! O, what a joy to know and to be esteemed by such a dear soul!

To my astonishment, I found that she is in some way connected with the firm—not exactly, you know—but she has an interest in the business, and the Manager, Mr. Ferguson, is her nephew. You can appreciate something of my predicament, when I realized how closely I was being drawn into the lives of people who would resent my very glances and spurn my social touch, if the slightest hint of my past should ever reach their ears.

Mrs. Marshall has repeatedly invited me to her home, and it has taxed my genius to make acceptable excuses—but, my confusion was greatest, when one day last month, Miss Ruth, her daughter—a delightful, girly girl of about 18 years—was presented to me by her mother—and then they both insisted that I take dinner with them on the following Sunday.

Mildred—Well, that's making progress—you certainly went—

Beulah—Most certainly *not*—how *could* I?

Mildred—Why? why didn't you go, dear?

Beulah—Mildred! impose myself on those people—deceive *them*—subject them to the possible humiliation of having my record disclosed to them, and by some social rival perhaps! O, Mildred, you would not have me do that?

Mildred—But Beulah, you are always looking out for the other fellow. If you are not good enough to associate with these people *now*, when in the world will you be?

Beulah—Only when I shall have lived down my past—but Mildred, I fear that the worst has come to the worst *today*—and, now to the particularly distressing occurrence that has filled me with anxious forebodings.

Mildred—You are unduly sensitive, my dear; maybe after

all, you are giving yourself to your old habit of crossing bridges before reaching them—

Beulah—But you don't know—you shall understand presently—I am so apprehensive of trouble. I feel it in my very bones that danger is at hand.

Mildred—Well, what in the world could have happened—what *can* happen?

Beulah—This morning, while Mrs. Marshall was chatting with me, at my counter, a gentleman approached her, and all the while he eyed me as if he were searching my very soul—I knew it intuitively that he recognized me—for the life of me, I could not place him. Just as Mrs. Marshall was about to present him to me, he affected not to note her purpose, but bent forward and whispered something in her ear, and then, turning on his heel, hurriedly passed out of my view. My head was in a whirl. Mrs. Marshall excused herself, saying that she would return in a few minutes, and with a most gracious smile took leave of me and passed on in the direction of my nemesis.

Mildred—You don't suppose that he would *tell* on you? But then, men do not care—it is their trade to despoil and destroy.

Beulah—Mrs. Marshall did not return; and, of course, she knows the truth. She must feel outraged at my touch—to think that she has exposed herself to the contamination of such as I—and her innocent daughter, too!

Mildred—Compose yourself, Beulah—If she is the right kind of a woman, she'll not condemn you. You have not imposed yourself on her—why, you have denied yourself the privilege of doing the very thing for which your heart yearned—to associate with respectable people.

Mrs. Marshall will now understand why you have never accepted her invitations; and her woman's heart will certainly not shut *you* out!

It'll come out all right, dearie, and if *not*—come back with me, and snap your fingers at Fate, and the cruel system that would crush a heart like yours—(*A knock at the door—Beulah opens the door.*)

Messenger Boy—(*Delivering message*)—A note for Miss Beulah Waring.

Beulah—(*Accepts note—nervously opens and reads, and exclaims*)—O, God! (*Falls on table, in convulsive grief—still*

holds note clutched in her left hand. Mildred takes the note and reads aloud.)

Mildred—(*reading from the paper*)—

Manager's Office

LACY'S.

Miss Beulah Waring,
427 West 52nd St.,
New York.

Dear Miss:—

We regret very much to inform you that we will be required to dispense with your services after today. Word has come to us, from reliable source, which makes this action on our part imperative. You will probably understand without any further explanation.

MATHEW FERGUSON,
Manager.

Mildred—Poor Beulah! She did her utmost—and failed! One of the million against whom society has its hand. A noble, generous-hearted, gentle woman; worthy to grace a home—deserving of *love* and protection, but the victim of a merciless system that slays human hearts and condemns to shame the erring girl, while it exalts and glorifies the man who wrought her woe. (*Curtain.*)



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**“Oh, the price that we pay
For the single mistake;
Oh, the souls that men slay,
And the hearts that they break.”**